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"LET SILENCE SPEAK"

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Pastoral Care 180

Pastoral Care and Women

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Thesis: The skills of empathy and listening are often stressed as important elements in pastoral counseling. Silence is rarely mentioned, but silence in the counseling encounter is of utmost importance. The role of silence in counseling is not simply one of technique, but a way in which to empathize and to communicate with a person, while simultaneously aiding the possibility of drawing both the person and the pastoral counselor into deeper levels of awareness both of themselves and of the presence and healing of God.

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INTRODUCTION

Something awoke me with a start. All seemed to be in order, and a quick check of my watch showed that it was 0430. In trying to convince myself that it was best to go back to sleep, an uneasiness continued. During this debate with myself, the loudspeaker on the ship came to life: "Fire, fire, fire! Lube oil leak in the engine room. Away, the flying squad, away. This is not a drill."

Fortunately, the emergency was quickly brought under control. In retrospect, my amazement grew at waking up before the emergency, until it became clear that what had awakened me was silence. On a ship, there is always the gentle background noise of fans, blowers, and associated machinery. This gentle rhythm was disrupted as circuit breakers switched off non-essential machinery. Silence spoke to me forcefully that night.

In pastoral counseling, empathy and listening are often stressed as hallmarks of the counselor. Silence is rarely mentioned, however, and it is my thesis that the role of silence in counseling is not simply a technique, but a way in which to empathize and to communicate with a person, while simultaneously aiding the possibility of drawing both the person and the pastoral counselor into deeper levels of awareness both of themselves and of the presence of God. Henri Nouwen quotes James Hillman of the Jung Institute in Zurich on part of this idea which draws people into awareness:

For the other person to open and talk requires a withdrawal of the counselor. I must withdraw to make room for the other.... This withdrawal, rather than going-out-to-meet the other, is an intense act of concentration, a model for which can be found in the Jewish mystical doctrine of

Tsintsum. God as omnipresent and omnipotent was everywhere. How then could the creation come about? ... God had to create by withdrawal: He created the not-Him, the other, by self-concentration.... On the human level, withdrawal of myself aids the other to come into being. 1

I. THE DIFFICULTY OF SILENCE

My thoughts on silence have been stimulated by serving as a chaplain in a state mental hospital. Not only does one need to be silent often to deflect delusional thought processes, but also there are times when silence is the only means of communication. The following verbatim from that hospital is an example of why silence can be so difficult. "C" is chaplain dialogue, and "P" is patient dialogue. This conversation occurred in a hallway.

P 1: (while walking down a hallway, a man called out to me before I even notice him) Chaplain, can you come over here?

C 1: (approaching) Hello.

P 2: (before we are even standing together) Chaplain can you pray for me? (said in an excited, hurried voice)

C 2: (finally coming to a stop in conversational range of the patient) You have to help me. Do we know one another?

P 3: Yes, I'm H. I met you on ward 443. (extends hand to shake hands, but remains leaning against the wall) You've got to just pray for me that the Lord would bless me.

C 3: I would be glad to pray with you. What would you like to pray about?

P 4: I don't have any problems. I thank the Lord every day that He gives us a new day. Maybe things will get better, but things are pretty good now. I'll be OK.

C 4: Yes. Better.

P 5: Yes, you know. I sure need your prayers so that God would help me with my struggles in the midst of my battles. I sure need a prayer. (patient is speaking so rapidly that some dialogue is not recalled)

¹ Nouwen, Henri J. M. The Wounded Healer. (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1979), p. 91.

C 5: (softly) Yes.

P 6: I'm OK. Really, I'm doing pretty good. The Lord has been with me every day. (pause) It will be all right, but I don't want to go to an open ward. They're going to put me on an open ward. I'd rather stay where I am, and do my battles there where people kind of know me. I want to stay where I am. It's good to struggle there where I fit it.

C 6: Yes.

P 7: I'm going to talk with them to see if I can stay. I don't know about that open ward.

C 7: I sense your worry.

P 8: Yeah. There he is now. (takes a step or two out into the hallway, looking past me) G, I don't want to go to that open ward. Can I stay where I am? (a technician is hurrying past with some other people, but replies: "We'll talk about it later, OK?") (pause, remains in the middle of the hallway, but turns to me)

C 8: H, I really liked how you asked for what you want.

P 9: Well, thanks chaplain. (starts to take a few steps past me)

C 9: Wait. Are you all right?

P 10: (stops walking, but is sideways to me) Yes, I'm OK.

C 10: Do you still want to pray?

P 11: No. I mean I'm not the authority. You just put in a good word for me. We don't have to say it out loud. Maybe the answer has already come. Yes, that's it. The prayer has been said. I'll be going. (begins to walk away)

C 12: (addressed to his back) OK. Hope to see you again.

This short interchange is a demonstration of how anxiety builds to such a point that people will ask for help. This man carried much anxiety and ambivalence about being moved to an open ward. He saw a chaplain, and the chaplain was present enough for the man to draw on his own strength. Like a miracle, the right technician passed by and the man's question received an answer. The problem comes at C 9. The man has finished his agenda, but

the chaplain has not: "Wait a minute," and the unsaid is that the chaplain does not realize what he has witnessed, and wishes to be of further help (because of his own narcissism). The patient has to explain to the chaplain that prayers do not have to be said aloud, especially because the answer to the prayer the patient has requested has already been heard.

"We don't have to say it out loud," and that is a problem for most pastors who are accustomed to the active, verbal role of proclamation. Technical experts must present their expertise.

The greatest difficulty for the pastor stems from his theology. He knows all there is to be known about sin and forgiveness. He knows what the faith is and he talks about it so much that he winds up no longer living in faith but in thinking about faith. ... We can then have no experience of faith. Our only experience is reflection on the faith. 2

Bonhoeffer's criticism may sound harsh, but if the pastoral counselor entertains the idea that at least three people are present in every counseling situation, namely: the counselor, the patient, and God, then the dynamics of the counseling situation contain both added creative possibilities and added restraints. The restraints do not concern imposing limits on the self fulfillment of the counselor, but the restraints do suggest that the counselor comes to the realization that she is not only in the presence of God, but also that God is in action.

To speak of God as being 'compresent' in very situation, including the counseling session, is to suggest a triadic relationship which both imposed restraints and created possibilities.. It clarified the meaning of healing by compelling both the counselor and the person seeking counsel to recognize the intractability of human limitations; it thus undercut any facile optimism about

² Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. Spiritual Care, Jay C. Rochell, transl. (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1985), pps. 67, 68.

counseling. It precluded manipulation and control by the counselor, who must recognize 'the presence of God who judges as a man must not judge, who redeems as a man cannot redeem.' 3

When the pastoral counselor carries her own agenda into the counseling situation, the ability to listen is minimized. With an eye on what she must do and accomplish in the time allotted, the possibility of spiritual growth both for the patient and herself is severely minimized.

I listened...no mean feat for me, since I am a talker. The ability to listen, I discovered, is an absolute necessity for spiritual growth...we do not have to dominate conversation in order to build up our own ego. ...if we discover, under stress, that we still do the talking, we prove that we do not really believe...[in] help from God...[for] others. 4

Bonhoeffer can sound quite critical of Christians who attempt to offer counsel to another, but who are limited by their ceaseless talking. He would say that one of the reasons that people do not turn to the church more often with their problems is because they know they will not find the help they are seeking. The most harsh condemnation is that the Christian who cannot listen to another person will soon find herself no longer listening to God either. 5 Bonhoeffer quotes James regarding holding the tongue in check to control both mind and body. When this discipline is practiced, an amazing discovery takes place,

³ Holifield, E. Brooks. A History of Pastoral Care In America. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1983), p. 327.

⁴ Mehl, Duane. At Peace with Failure. (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984), p. 39.

⁵ Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. Life Together, translated by John W. Doberstein. (New York: Harper and Row, 1954), p. 97.

namely: the encounter with another as a completely free person as God has created her. ⁶ A pastoral counselor commenting on this observation of Bonhoeffer says that the person who cannot listen also cannot speak honestly. Without the necessary silence on the part of the counselor to hear the patient, the counselor is only following her own follies. ⁷ The danger of attempting any proclamation in such a setting without first hearing, or hearing the patient in the depth of her needs, "is in its benign expression to attempt to mix oil and water; in its most malignant form to throw explosives in an open flame." ⁸ The counselor unconsciously may be attempting to gratify her own contingent needs. Seduced by her own narcissism, she becomes, in effect, deaf and blind to the plight, pain, and pathos of the patient. ⁹ The obvious solution to this problem is to listen, but this simplistic sounding action proves to be quite difficult. To listen to another is not simply the passive activity of silence, but a deep communion with another person which senses the uniqueness, strengths, limits, power, need, and faith of the other. ¹⁰

II. THE SILENCE WITHIN

⁶ Ibid., p. 92.

⁷ Cedarleaf J. Lennart. "Listening Revisited." The Journal of Pastoral Care. (Vol. XXXVIII, Dec. 1984, No. 4), p. 313.

⁸ Ibid., p. 313.

⁹ Ibid., p. 313.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 314.

Silence is not an absence, but an intention. The pastoral counselor who seeks to heal needs the gentle reminder that the pastoral task is not the same as the physician's task who attempts to alleviate pain. ¹¹ The goal of the pastoral counselor, and indeed all pastoral and spiritual care, is to lead people along in their own struggle to the point where they can make their own breakthroughs. ¹² The power for such leadership comes about through the pastoral counselor's own communion with God. The pastoral counselor must first learn that she is alone in this world with God as her only companion. Then, like Jesus before her, through this solitary communion with God, she will come to hear the cry of life in this world, and approach it knowing some of the intimacies of its heart. ¹³ The act of communion with God is a more vital and a more genuine act of fellowship and unity with others than thousands of gregarious individuals. ¹⁴

The theologian, Bonhoeffer, describes this growth from silence eloquently and mystically:

Spiritual silence is defined as 'the simple stillness of the individual under the Word of God.' By this Bonhoeffer means not only a quiet listening to the voice of God in church or in Scripture reading, but also keen attention to 'the Word within': "We are silent at the beginning of the day because God should have the first word, and we are silent before going to sleep because the last word also belongs to God. We keep silence solely for the sake

¹¹ Nouwen. op. cit., p. 92.

¹² Bonhoeffer. Spiritual Care. op. cit., pps. 66, 67.

¹³ Christensen, Bernhard. The Inward Journey. (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1976), p. 124.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 124.

of the Word. ... The stillness before the Word will exert its influence upon the whole day." (Life Together) 15

In another writing, Bonhoeffer describes how this growth of a person leads to community. It would be true, but too simplistic, to say that for Bonhoeffer everything is contingent upon Christ. The importance of this thought, however, is seen in the growth of a person's development and understanding not being self generated, but proceeding from Christ. The Christ who is among us is a mystery for even Bonhoeffer, but that same Christ calls a person into existence, and then places that person in relationship with others. 16

Henri Nouwen describes what a tremendous struggle keeping silent is when one seeks to come before God.

Thinking about my own prayer. I realize how easily I make it into a little seminar with God, during which I want to be useful by reading beautiful prayers, thinking profound thoughts and saying impressive words. I am obviously still worried about the grade! It indeed is a hard discipline to be useless in God's presence and to let him speak in the silence of my heart. But whenever I become a little useless I know that God is calling me to a new life far beyond the boundaries of my usefulness. 17

Another theologian, Joseph Sittler, admits that describing, or speaking about this process, is very difficult. While he acknowledges only partial understanding of the process, he declares it to be the central perspective for declaring the

15 Ibid., p. 159.

16 Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. The Martyred Christian, Joan Winmill Brown, editor. (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co. Inc., 1983), pp. 71, 72.

17 Nouwen, Henri J. M. The Living Reminder. (Minneapolis, MN: The Seabury Press, 1977) p. 52.

Christian story. 18 The pastoral counselor, William Hulme, likewise views this process as necessary personal preparation, and he notes how biblical characters like Moses, Elijah, John the Baptist, and Jesus began their vocations through the intentional use of silence and solitude. Mr. Hulme concludes that it is only in solitude that we can become present to ourselves. 19 He further affirms Nouwen's proposition by observing that indeed silence is all there is to open up a space in us where the Word can be heard, and in listening to the Word, one is already in communication with God. 20 The encounter between the soul and God ultimately transcends what language can contain, and thus silence is necessary. In many ways, the process is beyond words, and the only way to meet God is in silence. 21

III. SILENCE FOR THE COUNSELOR

A good technique for any counselor who is in doubt about the dynamics of a particular counseling situation may be to simply speak very little and listen a great deal. Silence requires the patient to keep talking. Many people will speak simply to keep the silence from becoming overly threatening. Silence may heighten internal dialogue to an uncomfortable level. Used only

18 Sittler, Joseph A. Grace Notes and Other Fragments. (Philadelphia, PA: Portress Press, 1981), p. 50.

19 Hulme, William E. Creative Loneliness. (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1977), pps 52, 53.

20 ----- Pastoral Care & Counseling. (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1981), p. 131.

21 Muto, Susan Annette. Pathways of Spiritual Living. (Garden City, NJ: Image Books, 1984), p. 57.

as a technique, however, silence serves no one. ²² What benefit may the counselor derive for herself from silence?

Bonhoeffer highlights confession and absolution in his writings because this is where the Christian community comes into being for him. Any experience in pastoral counseling will testify to the validity of the penitent and confessor model. For Bonhoeffer, what is of prime importance is that the confessor, the one hearing the confession, first make confession (even psychiatrists must be in therapy before they can practice). He would say that only those who have experienced the humility of confession can hear the confession of another in a spirit based on the love of Christ and not in a spirit of domination over someone. ²³ According to Bonhoeffer, confession is a time of self surrender when everything is given to Christ. In the wonder of God's forgiveness as we are received back into God's care, there is an experience of freedom because not even our sins belong to us any more. ²⁴ Only a person so freed can be a confessor, or counselor.

[My confessor]...listened to me...[and] helped me...to forge connecting links between the numerous disconnected pieces of my life. By who he was, he introduced me to the reconciling power of...forgiveness.... ²⁵

The freeing act of confession may be made in the presence of

²² Hass, Harold J. Pastoral Counseling with People in Distress. (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1970), pps. 78, 79.

²³ Bonhoeffer. Spiritual Care, op. cit., p. 64.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 63.

²⁵ Cedarleaf. op. cit., p. 314.

another, but the process begins in silence with the self. Henri Nouwen says that we have to listen to ourselves to come home to ourselves, and even Carl Rogers says that only in the listening and hearing of the self can change take place. 26 "Do not run, but be quiet and silent. Listen attentively to your own struggle." 27

...very slowly, we discover that the silent time makes us quiet and deepens our awareness of ourselves and God. ...before we are fully aware of it an inner momentum has developed that draws us more and more into silence and closer to that still point where God speaks to us. ... The word of God draws us into silence; silence makes us attentive.... The word of God penetrates through the thickness of human verbosity to the silent center of our heart; silence opens in us the space where the word can be heard. ... The word is born in silence, and silence is the deepest response to the word. 28

The pastoral counselor will make her own confession utilizing silence as preparation and as the center of her confession. Silence is not an empty space, but the intimate meeting place where God is encountered. 29

Besides assisting the gaining of freedom in confession, the importance of silence for the pastoral counselor is that it teaches her to speak. Philosophers as varied as Max Picard and Martin Heidegger insist that silence is the mother of speech. Silence protects speech in that it enables communication, when it occurs, to be true. As clear as words may seem, they tend to be

26 Ibid., p. 311.

27 Nouwen, Henri J. M. Reaching Out. (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1975), p. 23.

28 Ibid., p. 97.

29 Auto. op. cit., p. 34.

ambiguous when they do not proceed from silence. Heidegger, in particular, would say that only when we are silent can we be open to reality as it really is. 30

A word with power is a word that comes out of silence. A word that bears fruit is a word that emerges from...silence A word that is not rooted in silence is a weak, powerless word that sounds like a "clashing cymbal..." (1 Corinthians 13:1). All this is true only when the silence from which the word comes forth is not emptiness and absence, but fullness and presence, not the human silence of embarrassment, shame, or guilt, but the divine silence in which love rests secure. 31

Silence is not static, but generative insofar as it gives birth to words. 32 Not only will the pastoral counselor be better equipped to speak, but also she will not be constrained to speak. There is liberation from the thought that the pastoral counselor must have an answer for every question or a solution to every problem of every patient. Instead, she is free to be silent, or to indicate that she does not know the answer. The attempt to fill an emptiness following a question with an answer may prove to be a compromise of the faith in such a situation. Not only may silence be the only way to hear a question, but also the only way way to give an adequate answer. 33

...for some questions, even a good answer is wrong. The only correct reply to "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" is total silence. Simply to hear that "Why?" without dulling it...simply to share that "Why?" without shutting

30 Ibid., p. 55.

31 Nouwen, Henri J. M. The Way of the Heart. (New York: Ballantine Books, 1981), pps. 40, 41.

32 Muto. op. cit., p. 56.

33 Cain, David. "A Way of God's Theodicy: Honesty, Presence, Adventure," (The Journal Of Pastoral Care. Vol. XXII, December 1978, No. 4), p. 241.

it off can be an act of faith, a way of leaving God's will out of it and room for God in it. Sharing the question can even be a kind of answer. 34

A hindrance to the presence of God in the pastoral counselor's life and in the dynamics of a counseling situation can be linked to a lack of silence. 35 This silence has nothing to do with the silence of mystics, but the silence of the Church before the Word. "Be still, for that is the absolute," writes Kierkegaard, and he is echoed by Cyril of Alexandria, Luther, and a host of others: Let your words be few. God is in heaven. You are on earth; it is better to listen than to offer absurd sacrifice. --Ecclesiastes 5:2. 36 The ultimate point is not whether we say much or little, but whether or not our words and silences call forth the caring silence of God, the Wonderful Counselor. 37

With this discussion of silence in mind, another verbatim from the state mental hospital is offered. Yes, there will be silences, but you will also need to know that the patient is a long term, severely regressed and retarded patient. He had never responded to any of my visits in any way when spoken to, until this particular visit.

34 Ibid., p. 242.

35 Van Kaam, Adrian, C.S., Sp. Spirituality and the Gentle Life. (Denville, NJ: Dimension Books, Inc., 1974), pps 44, 45, 161.

36 Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. Christ the Center, translated by Edwin H. Robertson. (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1978), introduction, passim.

37 Nouwen. The Way of the Heart. op. cit., pps, 45, 46, 49.

C 1: (approaching the chair, kneeling down to the patient's level, and extending hand palm up) Hello.

P 1: (C. looks slightly up, but not at me, and visibly jerks, retreating into his chair...he is obviously startled)

C 2: (pause, slight smile toward him) It's OK.
(pause, soothingly) How are you today?

P 2: (silence, some of the stiffness leaves him)

C 3: (long pause, trying to make eye contact)

P 3: (the patient is more relaxed, brief eye contact, and a fleeting smile (??))

C 4: (silence)

P 4: (silence)

C 5: (said in a soothing voice) It's good to see you.

P 5: (slight stirring, and unnoticed to me because I am looking into the patient's face, he takes my hand)

C 6: (pause, the touch of our hands is light, I increase the pressure slightly several times in a stroking action) Yes.

P 6: (patient's hand goes slack, and I decrease pressure to the slightest of touch, patient withdraws hand)

C 7: (pause, my knees hurt in this awkward position, and I shift to a more upright position) I'm glad we could visit.

P 7: (sits with his customary crossed leg posture and is not looking at me)

C 8: (pause) Good-bye. See you again.

This visit was the beginning of a relationship. It was really the first time a meeting of these two people had taken place. The patient continues in his silence and a world unknowable by almost all, but now when he sees me entering the ward, he breaks out in a wide smile sometimes. On occasion, he will offer his hand before my coming near him. It is my conclusion that we are present to one another in our visits ("If he is not edified by my silence, he will not be edified by

my speech." 38).

Listen to the person, reassurance seldom helps. ...
fear has nothing to do with success or failure....
If you would have listened you would have heard that.
You can serve...better by being quiet. 39

IV. SILENCE FOR THE PATIENT

The father of client centered therapy, Carl Rogers, most likely would have been very supportive of the last verbatim. Much of his work attempts to convey in a clinical way what theologians attempt to communicate in references to spirituality regarding silence. Rogers describes the process of feelings being born in silence, making their way into the consciousness of a person, and finally becoming symbolized by verbal messages. Rogers is not against verbal therapy by any means, but he would see how the verbal messages are, in a curious way, the back door into a patient's world. The goal of his therapy is to enter into that private world which is so inadequately described in words.

When I stood next to this man in silence, it was not the case that nothing happened when we were silent. Clearly, he was very active inside himself, and to me it was also clear that I had a great deal to do with the process, and with the quality of this process within him. ...silences come to be...important and therapeutic, but [also then after silence] verbalizations become more significant.... [Silent] interaction is thus not giving up of verbal therapy, but rather a reaching for the deeper and wider process which occurs in every individual at every moment, and within which psychotherapy occurs. Words, no matter how relevant or irrelevant, are only messages from this deeper feeling process, only symbolizations of this

³⁸ Ibid., p. 30. This quote is attributed to one of the desert Fathers, Abba Pambo, when asked why he did not speak with a visiting archbishop.

³⁹ Cedarleaf. op. cit., p. 311. This is a response to a CPE student's verbatim.

experiencing. 40

Rogers would go so far as to say that there is a spiritual flow--an inward feeling process--which comes alive in silence and is then released. 41

This process of giving birth to feelings from deep within a person to the conscious level, and possibly the verbal level, is not to be confused with a pastoral counselor helping people to air their problems. Instead, the encouragement of the pastoral counselor permits expression of painful truths which the patient would rather keep hidden. In a sense, the awareness of these feelings may be compared to, or indeed become, an answer to prayer for the patient. 42 The moment of this awareness is not dependent on the pastoral counselor's expertise, nor does it occur because of a causal order of events. It is spontaneous because God's grace is irresistible to hearts created to respond to love. 43 The part of the mind which is most hidden--that which is often named, "the unconscious"--may be an intimation in many cases that we are connected with others and with God. 44

40 Rogers, Carl R. and Barry Stevens. Person to Person. (Lafayette, CA: Real People Press, 1967), p. 127.

41 Ibid., pps, 125, 126.

42 Cedarleaf. op. cit., p. 312.

43 Outler, Albert C. "Anxiety and Grace: An Augustinian Perspective," Constructive Aspects of Anxiety, Seward Hiltner and Karl Menniger, eds. (New York: Abingdon Press, 1963), p. 98.

44 Keller, Catherine. From a Broken Web: Separation, Sexism, and Self. (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International, 1984), p. 260. Dr. Keller is quoting a work by Susan Griffen.

In theological terms, what the patient experiences is confession. Not surprisingly, when the pastoral counselor provides a measure of silence for her patient, the possibility of confession is enhanced. Paul Tournier speaks of Job as an example. Job's friends could not break through Job's pain with their words. It was only when they were silent that Job could hear God's voice and be reconciled. In a similar way, Tournier encourages counselors not only to suspend judgment of a patient, but also to provide silence for the patient to come to a sense of confession. ⁴⁵ The act of confession does not necessitate formal or ritualized absolution. Tournier uses Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and the Publican to underscore that point. It is not in the words, nor in the ritual, but confession lies in an attitude of the heart and mind (feelings and awareness). ⁴⁶

...it may happen that a man talks to me about his faults, thinking he is confessing, but does so in a calm, neutral tone which take from his words all nature of confession. The important thing is not what one has said, but one's state of mind. In a silence, a sigh or a glance, there may be a more authentic confession than in long speeches. ⁴⁷

Another verbatim will not be offered in response to Tournier's observation, but there was a similar counseling encounter in my experience at the mental hospital. A newly admitted patient indicated that he had attempted suicide while under the influence of alcohol. Something rang hollow, however,

⁴⁵ Tournier, Paul. Guilt and Grace. (New York & Evanston: Harper and Row, 1962), p. 87.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 200.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 200.

and my response was silence. More and more sordid details of the man's past came to light, but they all were named with little affect. It soon became clear that the patient wanted me to become sympathetic to any of these problems so that it could be talked about as a distant entity without ever confronting the underlying source of his difficulties. Finally, he offered something which he thought a pastoral counselor would be sure to respond to, namely: that when he was released from the hospital, he hoped to hear me preach because he knew how helpful that would be for his problems. He was correct that I would respond, and my response was that hearing me preach would not help anything.

While my response may sound overly harsh to anyone not present at that encounter, it would have been poor theology to offer absolution. Remembering that Bonhoeffer spoke of spiritual care not seeking to alleviate pain as does a physician, Tournier uses the same thought to say that spiritual care does not seek to alleviate the burden of guilt, but to increase it. Only when the guilt becomes intolerable, or shifts from free floating feelings to consciousness, will a person be moved to make confession. ⁴⁸ My intention with this patient was to increase his anxiety. As a pastoral counselor, my task was not to effect a cure, but to attempt to be present at a reconciliation between a patient and God. ⁴⁹

Tournier reaches his conclusion concerning spiritual care

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 41.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 204.

based on process--the dynamic relationship between God and people. The outcome of history is known for the Christian, but the historical process is filled with uncertainties as to what any of us will become in that relationship. ⁵⁰ Karl Barth, for instance, quotes the German proverb of never being able to see more than half of the moon even when it is full. By this, he wishes to convey two aspects of God: His eternity and His actuality. God has immutable purposes; He is both transcendent and near; and in the midst of this there are shifting historical vicissitudes for His creatures. ⁵¹

My interpretation of this is an affirmation for trusting the process of silence for the patient. God is operative in the counseling situation. The pastoral counselor may want, wish, and hope much will happen for her patient. It will only be the One who knows the patient's inner world intimately in all of its wonder, complexity, and what William James calls "the warm phantasmagoric chamber of his brain with its storied walls and painted windows," who will allow His creature the freedom to create her choices.

God's ceaseless Activity should mean that the carer trust the silences. ...silence is creative. One of the more difficult aspects of caring on the part of the pastor is to allow the silences...to do their work. That work... is to encourage the client to enter into his solitude in the presence of the counselor.... Silence between two people is not the same as the silence of being alone. Silence between two people, if it is the silence of love, allows for each...the solitude in which to be under...

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 143.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 144.

persuasion to put things together. It is ironic that so often the religious pastor cannot tolerate silence so essential for the other to be religious. ...God is operative in the silences and within the creative solitude of the person's inner world. Perhaps the pastoral carer's main contribution is to guarantee the silences for God and the other to do their work. 52

Paul Mickey describes listening and guiding as one of the dynamics of pastoral care. He utilizes the give and take of commerce and sales as a paradigm to describe how the pastoral counselor not only sells, but also invites the patient to sell back--each is involved in the reciprocal relationship of being part of the other's world. 53 The transition between words and silence can be a similar invitational process when the pastoral counselor allows silences and invites silence from her patient.

When the carer speaks, especially in well aimed words that may become compelling, they often lure into a follow-up of silence which the sensitive carer will encourage by her own silence. ... This is one reason why interpretations should be carefully time, tentatively and briefly offered, and sparingly used. 54

Silence speaks, and the sensitive pastoral counselor will want to encourage its use for herself and her patient. There, together, they will have the possibility of hearing God speak.

...the relationship between pastor and counselee...[is] a way of entering together into the loving silence of God and waiting there for the healing Word. The Holy Spirit is called the divine Counselor. He is actively present in the lives of those who come together to discern God's

52 Jackson, Gordon E. Pastoral Care and Process Theology. (Lanham, MD, New York, London: University Press of American, 1981), pps. 57, 58.

53 Mickey, Paul and Gary Gamble with Paula Gilbert. Pastoral Assertiveness. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1978), Chapter 11, passim.

54 Jackson. op. cit., p. 133.

will. ...pastoral counseling is the attempt to lead fearful parishioners into the silence of God, and to help them feel at home there, trusting that they will... discover the healing presence of the Spirit. 55

The preparation of the pastoral counselor to be a confessor through confessing her own faults to God, the assisting with the confession of the penitent, and the healing process offered by God all happen best in and through silence. Silence is not the goal of counseling, but a means to trust God in the process of His marvelous workings.

Disciple

Jesus spoke of peace and so do I.
Jesus spoke of joy and so do I.
Jesus spoke of faith and so do I.
Jesus spoke of sacrifice and so do I.
Jesus spoke of pain and so do I.
Jesus spoke of crucifixion and so do I.
Jesus spoke of me and I am silent. 56

55 Nouwen. The Way of the Heart. op. cit., p. 45.

56 Molton, Warren Lane. "Disciple," Viva, Lutheran Campus Ministry, Vol.3, No.6, February 1987.

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